E 766
W 18

12/11/79

E 766
.W18
Copy 1

WOODROW WILSON

Has he been for "America First?"

Has he been for the great mass of the American people or has his Administration stood in with the Special Interests?

Address by

JOHN BRISBEN WALKER

At COOPER UNION

On THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 18th, 1915

...arn to
... Bibliography
... of Congress
(... not Catalogued)

E766
.W18

Transferred from
Librarian's Office
APR 3 1942

WOODROW WILSON

Has he stood for "America First?"

Address by John Brisben Walker

In his recent address before the Manhattan Club President Wilson challenged the people of the United States to give their criticism of his policies, previously, however, characterizing those who disagreed with him as "insincere" and "unneutral." "America First," is the catching slogan he then adopted.

I came here tonight accepting the President's invitation to speak freely of our country's condition and needs; and I come as an American, whose family, for more than two hundred years, has been engaged in notable constructive work upon this continent.

It is entirely fair to take Mr. Wilson upon his own test of citizenship. Has he been for "America First?" Has he been acting for the great mass of his fellow citizens whose votes elected him? Has he been neutral? Has he been sincere?

President Wilson has invited this analysis: it is especially important at this time, when the most completely organized conspiracy ever put on foot in America is undertaking to furnish profits to the manufacturers or armaments and munitions not only now but after the conclusion of the European war.

To what lengths they are willing to go is shown in the almost inconceivable resolutions of the Union League Club, unanimously adopted, to bring all young Americans under a conscription law, in order to provide an army. Into this Union League Club are gathered the swollen fortunes of unjust accumulation. It is the headquarters of the oligarchy of wealth which has so largely controlled the legislation of this country since 1870. Its president furnished the infamous constitution, just defeated in New York by half a million majority. Failing to destroy democratic institutions by an adroitly drawn constitution, they now have in mind to undermine the Republic by the introduction of militarism; while taxing the already over-burd-

ened country a thousand millions to furnish additional profits upon armor plate and military supplies.

The great financial houses which control these armament works have planned a campaign of the most complete character. They seem to have neglected nothing. The powerful newspapers which they control, the noted lawyers and lawyer-politicians who are employed by them, society which they dominate, and even the distinguished divines to whose support they contribute, have all been drafted for parts in this modern political drama. The Army and Navy and aspiring militia officers are, of course, engaged defacto.

Cooper Union has witnessed many protests against injustice —many appeals in behalf of human liberty. Where you now sit, men and women once sat to listen to Lloyd Garrison and Abraham Lincoln in opposition to holding human beings as chattel slaves: Would that we had Mr. Lincoln alive today for our protection! But the slavery that is practised in our factories and sweatshops of today, the exploiting of human beings that has grown up under this oligarchy of wealth, is more complete, more terrible and more dire in its results than black slavery ever was.

What would "America First" mean if we had a President who was not a mere trickster in phrases? Suppose him intensely eager to restore democracy to the people. Suppose that we had a President anxious about that mass of Amerians who are living today in poverty or in fear of want, because of the robberies which are being perpetrated upon them by the highwaymen of modern finances.

What could such a President do against the men who have gotten control of every necessity of life, and are annually reaping their hundreds of millions of illegal profits?

Is not this a case where Ezekial's warder on the tower might get into action, without violating any of the ideals of Christ?

The President will resent this suggestion. He has always had a poor opinion of his critics. "They are not very influential," he said of them in his Washington speech before the Daughters of the American Revolution. No wonder he should think so. Reading the praise of his administration in that portion of the metropolitan press controlled by the interests manufacturing armaments, he must believe himself the most popular of men. But let him not forget the tremendous power of penetration which truth possesses. As in the case of Roosevelt,

Truth takes time to do its work; but the President will find that it will get there.

I believe that when the inside history of the past six months comes to be written, it will tell of the most extraordinary conspiracy ever hatched by mighty financial interests and subservient politicians during the entire history of our Republic. Because of that large section of the American press which is controlled, directly or indirectly, by the chief factors in this conspiracy, the public has little comprehension of the facts.

Perhaps the quickest way to realize the situation is to suppose that a President, for reasons known to himself, should resolve to aid England and the Allies. What would it be possible for him, as President of the United States, to accomplish?

The first step would be to secure a Secretary of State who would be obedient to his will. A man of national reputation, in the State Department, would be a stumbling block. An amiable but obscure lawyer, previously connected with a law firm conducting an international claim business, having no national reputation to lose and anxious for salary and place, would most likely serve the purpose for which he would be appointed. The fact that he had never been heard of by the country, that he had taken no part in national politics, and that it was even disputed whether he was a Democrat or a Republican, would cut no figure.

Although the Vera Cruz invasion of Mexico was a usurpation, by President Wilson, of the powers of Congress, he successfully counted upon the distribution of offices to save him from impeachment. A declaration of war against Germany, however, without the authority of Congress, would not pass without arousing both the Senate and the House of Representatives. But, without subjecting himself to impeachment, he could:

I. Issue through his Secretary of State demands so aggressive, so couched in peremptory language, as would ordinarily be met with like terms. These have been the usual preliminaries in those national duellos which have been so fatal to mankind.

II. Although the President might already, in the case of Germany, have declared against the financing of war loans, he could, when England was found to be in distress, reverse himself and give aid and encouragement to the loaning of five hundred millions of American money to the Allies.

III. Although he might, already, in the case of Mexico,

have declared that it was the duty of the President to put an embargo upon the exportation of arms to peoples engaged in war, he could completely stultify himself and remove all obstacles to the shipment of those death-dealing implements which would increase the horror of the European war and delay peace.

IV. Although he might have forbidden the building of vessels of war for nations engaged in conflict, he could connive at the shipment of submarines "knocked down"—to be put together in Canada and sent across the Atlantic under their own power.

V. While talking loudly of the sacredness of international law, he could permit the violation of the most cherished traditions of that impalpable fiction of kings:

By allowing neutral ports to be blockaded to American commerce;

By tolerating the seizure of American ships, with neutral cargoes, upon the high seas, and the confiscation of their cargoes;

By permitting passengers to be taken from American ships, steaming upon the high seas;

Finally, by allowing American owned vessels, sailing under the American flag, between American ports, to be seized by a British cruiser and carried off to England.

VI. He could unite his voice with that portion of the American press engaged in heaping insult and contumely upon American citizens who refused to side with the allies, and who denounced the monstrous position taken in permitting the shipment of arms and munitions.

VII. He could refrain from decisive action to prevent the enlistment of American youth for service in Canadian and English armies until the matter had become a public scandal.

VIII. He could permit without serious protest the use of the American flag in the war zone by English vessels.

What else could a President do? Nothing other than what has been here set forth, without the aid of Congress.

All fair-minded men and women in my audience will agree with me that I have stated the situation fully. If, while doing these things, he solemnly vowed his own neutrality and accused all who opposed him of being unneutral, his offenses would be aggravated.

And supposing that while loudly asseverating his slogan of "America First," he had converted the Presidency into a useful tool for Wall Street speculators who had allied themselves to foreign powers: What then would be his position before the American people—especially before that great mass of humble men and women who had, because of his protestations that he would be their defender against these very Wall Street speculators, given the votes to elect him?

Is not this statement of the case a very fair one?

Now that I have set forth the acts of which a President might be guilty if he were to become the secret ally of a foreign nation, let us take up dispassionately President Wilson's administration during the past twelve months, and determine by careful analysis how far it has been in accord with strict neutrality and how far the President has kept in mind "America First." Let us determine carefully if Mr. Wilson has departed from those right ideals which he has so constantly reiterated for the benefit of his fellow countrymen.

Having in mind the things of which a President could have been guilty if he were secretly to ally his great office with one or the other of the warring peoples, we shall have a standard by which we may measure Mr. Wilson's acts.

First, however, we must go back a little into Mr. Wilson's life, and learn something of the man. Prior to 1911, the most important part of his days had been spent as President of Princeton University. The chief benefactors of this seat of learning had been men whose fortunes centered in and around Wall Street. Princeton had become a seat of education for every ideal that was opposed to political progress. Mark Hanna found his best subscribers among Princeton's supporters. Grover Cleveland naturally took up his residence there upon his retirement from the Presidency, and was made a professor.

The initiative, the referendum and the recall were regarded in Princeton as the suggestion of that personal devil in which so many distinguished gentlemen in that neighborhood professed belief. Every step in the direction of taking government out of the hands of an oligarchy of wealth and giving power to the people, found valiant opponents at Princeton. And among them was Professor Wilson, the historian. His writings all showed subservience to the powers that were in control. He was so anxious to get rid of Bryan, that pestilent preacher against corruption, that he wrote in the least flattering of terms, asking

if no way existed to eliminate him from the Democratic Party.

But in 1912 the country seemed destitute of men capable of administering the Presidency, except in behalf of the special interests. The Republicans offered Taft and Roosevelt, equally on the side of the people's enemies. The Democrats had to the front Speaker Clark, who had always run with the hounds and played with the fox.

Suddenly Mr. Wilson, who, for years, had written against progressive measures, had completely reversed himself. The country seemed to have turned progressive, and Mr. Wilson began making progressive speeches.

I confess that I was fool enough to believe that a man who had shown himself so completely out of sympathy with every interest of the common people, could have a change of heart. I wrote to him frankly alluding to his past beliefs: I was disposed to accept his change of heart if he would give me a personal assurance to that effect.

In my letter alluding to his histories, I said: "I would not have believed that I could have regard for a man who could write so ignorantly and with so much prejudice of place and class." And, further on, "I forgive the past and pin my faith not only to your honesty and integrity for the future, but that you see clearly all that the battle for humanity means." In his reply, Mr. Wilson said: "Your generous letter of February 19th, has gratified me very deeply indeed. It is indeed true that things are perfectly plain to me now, which formerly I could not see at all; and what affects me most is the generosity of men who, like yourself, realize the reality of this change. I am certainly your debtor for your generous judgment of me. Sincerely yours, Woodrow Wilson."

I sent copies of this letter to friends asking their aid in securing the nomination of Mr. Wilson. Some of them in reply reflected upon my intelligence: could I bring myself to believe that a "leopard could change its spots?" But I appeal to this audience: Did any man ever give more solemn pledge that he had reversed his beliefs than Mr. Wilson in this letter?

To turn to Mr. Wilson's favorite field, I might say that his conversion was not more sudden than that of Paul of Tarsus, who, from persecuting the Christians, suddenly became their bishop. But I ought to have recollected Chauteaubriand's famous words about repentance: "Christ gave but one example of deathbed repentance—that of the penitent thief on the cross. He

has given one in order that no man might despair; and but one in order that no man might presume." I doubt if a search of the modern political world would reveal a proportion as large as those of Chauteaubriand's.

I appeal to you, my friends, here tonight and I appeal to the American public that believes in straightforward manliness, if these assurances of Woodrow Wilson did not mean that he had completely gone over from the Mark Hanna-Grover Cleveland conceptions of government and that hereafter he would be found fighting the battles of the common people.

Now let us take up in their order the several acts which an unneutral President might have committed, and determine if our Chief Executive has been guilty of any one of them.

First, we have the all important matter of furnishing arms and munitions to countries engaged in war in Europe. That Mr. Wilson believed the President to have absolute power to stop the shipment of munitions to countries engaged in war, we are given absolute proof by his action in forbidding shipments to Mexico.

Therefore the matter becomes one of deliberate intention upon his part—deliberate willingness to permit the sacrifice of a million lives. What inducement could have wrought this change other than placating the powerful Wall Street interests to whom it meant hundreds of millions to supply the allies with munitions, and still more if they could throw the United States into this European war?

Upon Mr. Wilson rests the responsibility for this crime—the greatest the world has ever known, if we are to measure this infinitely cruel commerce by the resultant human suffering. What a frightful brand this Executive has stamped for all time upon the American people, by tolerating this bloody traffic! Without the animus of war, without the motive of self protection, without even the excuse of hate, but solely from the sordid desire for dollars, every agency has been set to work to destroy the lives of our European brothers under the immediate approval of a Chief Executive, elected upon a platform of humanity!

The American people were mystified by the provocative language used in the communications which Washington addressed to Berlin. Undoubtedly the wording was purposely arrogant and offensive. No one believes that if Germany had not been engaged in a life and death struggle, a note of this

character would have been sent; unless there were deliberate intention to provoke a conflict.

This act was distinctly the President's own. When his Secretary of State refused to sign, he was forced out of the Cabinet. The note sent Germany was in violation of the Constitution of the United States, which distinctly reserves to Congress the war-making power—a corollary of that article of the Constitution, being that the Secretary of State may not embroil us with a foreign nation by writing notes so peremptory as to leave Congress no alternative, in the event that the demand is met by a refusal, written in like terms.

Mr. Wilson invaded Mexico in express violation of the Constitution of the United States. But undoubtedly, underlying all his actions, is the feeling that he is able to dole out offices —by this abominable power to bribe Senators and Representatives by bestowing office upon their constituents.

There is little likelihood of his being held to account by men dependent upon this almost kingly favor. Perhaps the most supreme disregard ever shown for neutrality was when Mr. Wilson permitted an officer of the Treasury Department to associate himself with the New York bankers who welcomed England's Royal Commission, sent over to negotiate a war loan of five hundred millions to the Allies.. The President not only allowed this to pass without rebuke, but he has stood in silent approval while the American people are being made the victims of this foreign confidence game—while the United States mails are used to extract money from the pockets of farmers and workingmen upon securities that may prove worth fifty cents on the dollar, if this war is long continued.

Moreover, Mr. Wilson knows that these dollars taken from American banks are needed here and now for American industry. His own Secretary of the Treasury has just reported that more than one thousand national banks are charging the business men of the south and west from ten up to one hundred and twenty per cent per annum for money with which to transact business. Does this state of affairs look like "America First?" Reflect for a moment the handicap put upon the national industry by these banks operating as a part of the National Treasury Department. Has Mr. Wilson been excited over these injustices? He, on the contrary, reserves his indignation for the hyphenated citizens who eliminate from Congress a Wall Street superserviceable.

Perhaps the most flagrant violation of neutrality committed by Mr. Wilson is the permission granted by him to build English submarines in this country, and ship them to Canada "knocked down"—sailing them thence across the seas. This needs no discussion. It is a bold, direct, inexcusable violation of neutrality, which, in view of our claims against England for the construction of confederate privateers, may some day involve us in endless trouble and cost. Perhaps this may seem to furnish to Mr. Wilson the excuse needed for the appropriation of a thousand millions of dollars for "preparedness."

How could President Wilson play into the hands of England better than by allowing her to clear American shipping from the seas? For nearly a year the State Department showed a disinclination to interfere with England, gobbling in the cargoes of American ships. Finally, evidently confident of the approval of Mr. Lansing, a British cruiser seizes upon an American ship, sailing from New York to one of our own Southern ports, and carries her off to England. To what pass will the affrontery of England and the complacency of Mr. Wilson come next?

I need only touch upon the use of the American flag by English vessels to confuse and deceive the enemy—nothing could be better calculated to put American seamen and American vessels in jeopardy—and come to the final count in this long catalogue of the President's unneutrality.

We have in the United States probably twenty millions of American citizens of German descent. They are largely people of education and industry. Their chief fault has laid in their refusal, in the past, to be deeply interested in the real problems of our government. They have too often allowed their votes to be used by demagogues working as an ally of the special interests. But I am inclined to think that what they have recently gone through will permanently cure this indifference. Hereafter they are likely to realize the danger of permitting their fellow citizens to be ravaged by Wall Street.

Naturally this citizenry of German derivation, having relatives and friends in the present war, have been anxious for peace. Loyal to the United States, they view with alarm the efforts of the pro-ally arm manufacturers of Wall Street to draw this country into antagonism to Germany. Friendly to Mr. Wilson, they were astounded by his successive steps in unneutrality. In a great national convention at Chicago, they joined with peace advocates representing an American citizenship that had in it

the strains of many nationalities, to demand strict neutrality and to oppose the development of that militarism in America which has been the misfortune of Europe.

What, then, is their surprise, when Mr. Wilson in a formal address, singles them out and applies to them insulting phrases! It is an unprecedented spectacle, this of the President of a great nation singling out some twenty millions of its people, distinguished for the high class of their citizenship, and without justification applying to them language calculated to humiliate.

Because of efforts covering more than twenty years in behalf of Peace and "World Confederation," I was made presiding officer of that Chicago convention. I came into contact with Americans of German descent as never before. I was impressed with their earnestness and sincerity. I do not believe that America holds better citizens. The time will come when Mr. Wilson's intemperate language will be regarded as a misfortune to the entire people of the United States.

After reviewing these facts, I submit to you, my audience, and I submit to the American people these questions:

Who has proven himself to be unneutral?

Who has shown that, instead of working for "America First," he has been conspiring to aid those interests in Wall Street which seemed likely to him to control the next presidential nomination?

Let us turn once more to Mr. Wilson's stress upon "sincerity" and "America First" and see what platform he was elected upon, and gauge what Mr. Wilson might have done if he had been really for "America First." Almost his first step after entering upon the Presidency was to take the Aldrich Bill, which had been repeatedly refused by Congress, and almost unanimously rejected by the American people, and rehabilitate it under another name and with himself and three men that had never taken part in national financial discussions as sponsors. Mr. Wilson did not tell the people that this Federal Reserve bill had been written not by its nominal sponsors, but by Wall Street. I and others reminded him that a bill of such a character should have public discussion through at least one congressional campaign. At the behest of the men whom he was even then serving, he jammed it through by the force of the patronage which is dispensed from the White House.

The proof of its Wall Street parentage was demonstrated when an attempt was made to insert provisions providing for

those farmers who are victims of the ten to one hundred and twenty per cent. loans, already referred to. Not for a minute was Wall Street interested in providing for anything but its own speculations, and Mr. Wilson ignored the farmer. One had only to read Mr. Wilson's chapter on the history of Nicholas Biddle's United States Bank and its destruction by General Jackson, to see how little he understands finance.

I am strongly inclined to believe that Mr. Wilson was committed to the passage of this bill by certain influential Wall Street interests, during the progress of his campaign for election. The rapid, unhesitating way in which it was suddenly produced and pushed through has every appearance of a cut and dried job.

This act has in it the most tremendous powers of political control of any measure ever passed by Congress. It has already become a mere adjunct of Wall Street operations. It will be interesting when we learn what part it is playing in discounting merchantable paper, in order to leave other money free for the five hundred million loan of the allies.

Another example of Mr. Wilson's conception of "America First." Take the Parcels Post! Mr. Wilson came into office, pledged to see a real parcels post established—one that should take up the fruit and vegetables of the farmer which are now, so often, left to rot on the ground, because of prohibitive transportation rates, and place them in the laps of the starving poor of our great cities.

But the express companies seem to be in close touch with the Wilson administration. No determined step has been made to take over the express business for the Post Office, when the law places it. The post office rates are made to play into the hands of the express companies and the people are sacrificed; fruit rots in the orchards, and vegetables decay in the ground; the poor starve because the pledges of the men in the White House were only made to get in on.

What does Mr. Wilson mean when he says America must come first? Does he mean by America his friends, the express companies?

What anxiety has Mr. Wilson shown since his entrance into the White House, to curb those great combinations of capital which are today in control of almost every article upon which America depends for comfort? In the office of Attorney General, it was essential to have a friend of the people, not of the trusts.

It was a favorite trick of Wall Street to secure an Attorney General who will seemingly prosecute. We might as well have a Wickersham in office as Mr. Wilson's attorney general.

The Baltimore Convention recognized that, in the past, Presidents have been tempted to sacrifice the public by trading for the influence of the big interests for a renomination. Having in mind the lamentable spectacle of a Roosevelt breaking his solemn promise regarding a third term, the Convention determined to put it out of the reach of the candidate for the Presidency to break his word, and pledge him that there should be no second term.

Mr. Wilson has not hesitated to quote the Baltimore platform when it served his purpose. But now he publicly declares that the pledge of no second term meant nothing. It was an idle declaration with no other purpose than to fool the people. It has served its design—let it pass to the scrap heap. "Of course, if the people show that they must have me for a second term, I must obey their command"—the public meaning the clamor of the paid press controlled by armament manufacturers.

How is it possible for men who have been honored so highly by the people of America, to descend so low in the scale of integrity!

And again, speaking of sincerity, what of the man to whom woman suffrage was so repugnant that he rudely repulsed delegations of distinguished women wishing to lay their views before him? Yet when the great mass of American voters seemed inclining towards woman suffrage, Mr. Wilson voted for it in New Jersey under the absurd plea that "woman suffrage is a local issue."

But there is an even more serious aspect to the matter. With the peoples of five continents obsessed by the fierce antagonisms of war, civilization had its only hope in the hundred millions of Americans within the United States. There was every reason why we should set an example to the world. Regret that our brothers should be engaged in war, determination that no act of ours should seem to countenance the barbarities being perpetrated under the name of civilized warfare, a generous solicitude for the misfortunes of all countries, and the most careful guarding of our neutrality, would bring it to pass that in the course of time all countries at war would turn to the United States for aid in bringing the end of so frightful a contest. It was the world's one best hope.

Far-reaching in its consequences has been Mr. Wilson's crime of unneutrality, and profound has been the disappointment with which thinking men who sympathize deeply with the miseries of their European brothers, have viewed the grossly unneutral acts committed by his administration.

I will venture to predict Mr. Wilson's future as I, in 1907, in this very hall, forecast the future of Theodore Roosevelt.

To read the Wall Street press, President Wilson is today the most popular man in America. He himself believes this. Yet one so poor in stamina, so unalert to the needs of the great mass of humanity, so callous to the sufferings of the unfortunate, and so willing to permit his administration to serve the great special interests, will one day stand exposed, as Roosevelt today stands naked in his character.

Remember, Roosevelt was once the idol of America. Because of his promises, the public hoped great reforms from him as because of Mr. Wilson's promises, they had hopes at the beginning of his administration. Each of these men had the opportunity to deserve more of their fellow men than Abraham Lincoln, because the issues of this hour are of greater moment to mankind than those of 1861. But they have failed, because neither had Abraham Lincoln's high ideals and integrity of purpose. Roosevelt betrayed the common people, as Mr. Wilson has been secretly betraying them; and ultimately he stood fully revealed: as Mr. Wilson will one day stand fully revealed to his now applauding countrymen.

And as today there are none so poor as to do Mr. Roosevelt reverence—perhaps I should except Mr. Perkins—so Mr. Wilson's hour will come when, cold-blooded, selfish, the betrayer of the welfare of his fellow men, he will be cast aside by the interests which now use him. This, because he will no longer be useful for fooling the people.

And he will stand alone, an object of pity to his friends, of great opportunities sacrificed before the flattery of the powerful interests which sought only to use him—a monument of failure, because he lacked the courage to fight unjust accumulators of wealth, and take his stand with suffering humanity.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 013 900 818 2

The Friends of Peace and Justice

JOHN BRISBEN WALKER, President

A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION

Working towards a Higher Justice for Men and Women and a more scientific organization of Society, in which there shall be truer ideals for the strong and less of misery and fear for the weak. The President and Officers give their services without compensation of any kind. The work of the organization is carried on by voluntary subscriptions of those who are in accord with the efforts for Justice and Peace.

Additional copies may be obtained at
150 Nassau Street, Room 1318, New York City

PRICE, - 5 CENTS

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
0 013 900 818 2

Hollinger
pH 8.5
Mill Run F3-1955